

'Subtle Spectacular' on Capitol Hill

It is a Senate subcommittee's little noted study of an area—policy planning—that has suddenly been spotlighted by the summit collapse and the affair of the U-2.

By CABELL PHILLIPS

WASHINGTON. CONGRESSIONAL investigations are usually of two kinds. They either overwhelm the spectator with their gaudy dramatics, or lull him to sleep with dullness. Currently, there is one in progress that bridges these extremes—it is a subtle spectacular being played before an almost non-existent audience in an out-of-the-way hearing room by the improbably titled Senate Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery. By the script, this should be pretty soporific stuff, but its impact is such as to keep a good many people in high places awake and on the edge of their seats.

The stated mandate of this small band of inquisitors is innocuous enough to look into ways of improving the machinery through which high policy for the cold war is made. But inevitably it is being drawn into an examination of policy itself: of the decisions this Administration has made, and is following, in the sensitive field of national security. No prerogative lies closer to the heart of the soldier-President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, than this, and no issue has more explosive potential in this political year than the question of whether all that needs to be done is being done to win the cold war.

Frightening urgency has been given to such questions as these by the U-2 espionage incident and the débâcle of the summit conference in Paris only two weeks ago. For here, most competent observers believe, was an obvious failure of planning and coordination at a most critical juncture of the cold war. As a consequence, the subcommittee is looking into the whole U-2 affair as a "timely case study." Under its mandate it will be concerned with what went wrong rather than with who did wrong, but it may be impossible to separate the two in the public hearings.

SPARKS of controversy were struck at the first open hearing several weeks ago. What had been planned as a rather academic walk-through of the policy-planning mechanism at the White House level veered off into a chilling indictment of "complacency" in the face of the mounting Communist offensive. The testimony—restrained but direct to the bull's-eye came from Robert A. Lovett, financier and former Secretary of Defense; Robert C. Sprague, chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, and Thomas J. Watson Jr., president of the International Business Machines Corporation.

What these men from the world of finance said was later reinforced by witnesses from the world of science, among them Dr. James A. Perkins, vice president of the Carnegie Corporation and a member of the 1957 Gaither Commission; Dr. James B. Fisk,



Conference—Senator Jackson (right), head of the subcommittee, talks with staff aides J. K. Mansfield and Dorothy Fosdick.

president of Bell Telephone Laboratories and vice-chairman of the President's Science Advisory Committee, and Dr. Eugene P. Wigner, Professor of Mathematical Physics at Princeton.

These are men whose experience and knowledge and motives are beyond any challenge of pettiness or partisanship, and an ominous consensus has emerged from their testimony. It is that the mechanics of policy planning at the highest level have been made obsolete by the speed of a technology that has welded political, economic and military considerations into a single imperative—national survival; that vital policy decisions are often extemporized, or based on inadequate information, or constricted by habits of thought that have been outmoded; and, finally, that there is a failure at the top policy level to sense either the magnitude of the threat facing the country or the immensity of the effort needed to combat it.

As Mr. Lovett put it: "I feel that we are doing something short of our best . . . If [Khrushchev's] statement, 'We will bury you,' does not carry the message to us, then words have lost their meaning. If we are not prepared after that statement to admit that we are in

a struggle for survival, then we have truly succumbed to the hard sell of the soft attitude."

And Dr. Perkins, appearing a few weeks later, was even more specific. "Somebody would have to prove to me," he said, "that we have not given up important capabilities in the field of air defense and limited war, and maybe even in our deterrent program, as the price for getting all our requirements within a stable military budget."

THE genesis of this significant inquiry lies in one man's worry, for a long period of time, over the provocative question: How can a free society organize to outthink, outplan and outperform totalitarianism and achieve security in freedom?

The worrier was Senator Henry M. Jackson, Washington Democrat and a leading member of both the Armed Services and Joint Atomic Energy Committees. Last summer, he proposed to the Senate, and the Senate approved, a study of the whole policy-making apparatus relating to national security.

He promised a scholarly, nonpolitical approach and said that the subcommittee's report would not be released until after the election. He also sought the blessing of the White House, since he would have to delve deeply into its inner workings, and particularly into its central policy-making organ, the National Security Council. After a good deal of skeptical deliberation, this was granted, but with a number of caveats attached—that any probing into the substantive operations of the N. S. C. should be off-limits, that a White House representative should be on hand for all discussions of the N. S. C., and that the subcommittee should describe its mission as an "inquiry" and not an "investigation."

"We took this," Jackson said, "in order to avoid fights over prerogatives. Moreover, we really aren't out to 'get' the White House or the Security Council or anybody else. This is something that has to do with national survival, and we need the cooperation of everybody concerned."

Serving on the subcommittee with him are Democrats Hubert H. Humphrey, Minnesota, and Edmund S. Muskie, Maine, and Republicans Karl E. Mundt, South Dakota, and Jacob K. Javits, New York. But the subcommittee is pretty much Jack- (Continued on Page 46)

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son's baby, and he has had a free hand in running in.

For staff he turned first to Dorothy Fosdick, who was a member of Dean Acheson's policy-planning staff when he was Secretary of State, and to J. K. Mansfield, a former teacher of international relations at Yale and an in-and-out in many high-level consultative posts with the Government. The chief consultant is Robert Tufts, Professor of Economics at Oberlin College and former policy-planning staffer at the Department of State. In all, there are ten staff members and part-time consultants.

FOR six months this staff read, talked, thought, and wrote memos to itself. The members interviewed the chiefs and other members of all the important Government agencies in town, and they fanned out to the major universities, foundations and laboratories across the country. They asked:

What was thought about the planning operation as it now exists?

What happens to ideas on their way up the bureaucratic pipeline from incubation level to action level?

What is the effect of compartmentalization among military, economic and political sectors of planning?

Should administrators be depended on for primary planning?

What are the weaknesses of the present operation, and how can they be corrected?

Out of more than 500 separate interviews the subcommittee has accumulated a vast file of factual data and personal opinion. It has staked out as major areas for attention these matters: the roles of the President and the National Security Council, the roles of the State and Defense departments, budget-making and problems of economic growth, science and technology, and finally, the part individuals play in relation to the whole planning process. It has already begun to shape its ideas about how the planning machinery can be improved, and these ideas are being reinforced and modified by the expert witnesses who testify before the committee.

INEVITABLY, the subcommittee's public performance partakes more of the graduate seminar than of the Congressional inquisition, except when it is unexpectedly enlivened by a sharply revealing or critical comment from one of the witnesses. Such sallies bring prompt ripostes from the subcommittee's alert minority counsel, Edward Pendleton, who by questions and elucidation attempts to dull or deflect these stray missiles.

"Throughout this discussion," he reminded one witness recently, "you have referred to the President. Do you mean by 'the President' any particular occupant of that position?"

"I was talking about the Presidency," the other responded.

"And not the present incumbent in particular?"

"No, sir."

The high quotient of sensitivity arises from the fact that there is here an implicit invasion by the Legislative branch of the jealously guarded precincts of the Executive. Such an inquiry in the hands of a biased or an imperceptive Senator could create serious frictions and hamper rather than help the policy-making process.

Fortunately, this is unlikely to happen. The guiding genius of the subcommittee, Senator Jackson, is a quiet, hard-working, mild-mannered, youngish-looking bachelor with gentle gray eyes and guileless demeanor, who is more noted among his colleagues for plodding earnestness than for crusading zeal. He approaches his present mission as a student seriously intent on finding the answer to a knotty problem of government.

Jackson was born in Everett, Wash., of Norwegian immigrant parents, on May 31, 1912. He waited on table to pay his way through the University of Washington, where he got his law degree in 1935, and five years later, at the age of 28, was elected to the House of Representatives. For a politician with a career singularly free of color or controversy, he has achieved a remarkable string of electoral successes. He moved up to the Senate in the Republican landslide year of 1952 by polling 30,000 more votes in his state than Mr. Eisenhower.

"I don't know how to explain him as a politician," a long-time friend recently said, "except by the fact that he's just a hell of a nice guy with a hop on the ball and who is always up on his homework."

His addiction to homework has much to do with his standing in the Senate. Early in his Congressional career he became absorbed in the twin problems of nuclear energy and national defense and set about learning everything he could in these fields. Today, his knowledge and his opinions command the highest respect not only in the Senate but in the Pentagon and in Government scientific circles as well.

For the past several years he has hammered at the question of whether this nation's defenses are adequate. He has been skeptical of the bland assurances offered by high military and civilian officials, and he often has pinned them



WITNESSES who criticized policy planning. Top, l. to r., Robert A. Lovett, ex-Secretary of Defense; Robert C. Sprague, chairman, Fed-



eral Reserve Bank of Boston; Thomas J. Watson Jr., president, International Business Machines Corp. Bottom, l. to r., James B. Fish, presi-



dent, Bell Telephone Laboratories; Eugene P. Wigner, professor of physics; James A. Perkins, vice president of the Carnegie Corp.

down with his own superior knowledge. He was primarily responsible for "rescuing" Capt.—now Vice Admiral—Hyman Rickover from Navy Department obscurity and getting him a go-ahead for the development of the nuclear submarine. And he won a two-year battle with the Defense Department and the Atomic Energy Commission on stepping up the output of weapon-producing plutonium.

In a lecture at the National War College a year ago the Senator summarized his views in these words:

"What seems most to be missing is a coherent and purposeful national program that sets forth in simple terms what we have to do to survive, and why. In wartime there is a basic strategy to defeat the enemy. Our leaders know, and our people know, what they are trying to do and what is demanded of them. . . . We have no comparable strategy for the cold war. . . ."

INEVITABLY, the Jackson subcommittee's work has come to focus—for the present, at least—on the National Security Council, the Government's highest strategy-planning board.

The N. S. C. was created under the National Security Act of 1947 as a part of the Executive Office of the President. Its statutory membership is limited to the President, Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense and Director of Civil Defense and Mobilization, with a professional staff to help. However, President Eisenhower has expanded the

N. S. C. by adding other top Government officials as regular or occasional members. In theory it acts as a funnel to put before the President all the essential information he must have to formulate policy in any area affecting national security.

There has never been much of a quarrel about the basic concept of the N. S. C. It was born out of the shock of Pearl Harbor and the war that followed. Its major assignment soon became the masterminding of the cold war, and it nurtured such innovations in United States policy as foreign aid, the "containment" of Communist imperialism, and the doctrine of collective security.

BUT with the proliferation of cold war threats and crises and with the birth of the age of space, many feel that the Security Council is no longer capable of meeting the demands put upon it. This complaint goes primarily to the question of its structure but it also embraces the manner of its use. Such disquieting fears have been expressed by many responsible individuals who have had a look behind the curtain of secrecy that surrounds the agency.

The substance of what is being said in the subcommittee hearings is that the Security Council has become too big, too diffuse, that it has lost its sense of purpose. Instead of serving as a sharp, unambiguous focus on basic policy problems, it has, according to its critics, become "little more than a paper mill." &

"If I were to make a general judgment about the N. S. C.," Dr. Perkins told the committee, "it is that the President has not received from the normal N. S. C. routine the kind of sharp debate, the clear differences of opinion, the new ideas that would require major modifications of program."

SOME witnesses have questioned the recent tendency to make policy decisions within a predetermined budget ceiling. "The budget officer," Mr. Lovett told the committee, "should be a consultant and a participant, but not a decision-maker." Others have deplored the lack of proper coordination of policies between the Departments of State and Defense.

But inevitably such discussions of the process of planning become involved with the product of planning, and this leads into sensitive appraisals of the personal judgment that goes into the making of policy decisions. Thus, Mr. Sprague told the committee he thought the President was the only man who could awaken the country to the need for a greater effort to secure our survival, adding, "I believe that the danger is more serious than the President has expressed, himself, to the American public."

Jackson and his staff do not try to stifle such spontaneous and pointed observations, but neither do they openly encourage them. They are realists enough, however, to know that they help draw public attention to their work,

and, as one member explained, "We aren't likely to get any meaningful results out of all this unless the public becomes interested in what we're doing."

The end result the committee seeks is to have ready for whoever the next occupant of the White House may be a blueprint for a refurbished policy-planning mechanism that will, in Jackson's words, "not only improve the planning process itself but help the new President to identify the areas in which fresh and imaginative planning has become essential."

WHAT this may mean is not yet known, but it seems likely that an extensive overhaul of the N. S. C. will be high among the committee's eventual recommendations. The aim will be, probably, to reconstitute it as a more compact forum for the debate of basic policy questions unencumbered by bureaucratic handicaps. This might involve better staffing, better coordination between planning functions of the State and Defense Departments and, possibly, legislation to put appropriations for certain national security operations, such as foreign aid and defense, on a long-term instead of a one-year basis. Another idea taking form is the creation of a Science Advisory Council for the President which would have a status comparable to that of the present Council of Economic Advisers.

A persistent question the committee faces is this: are we geared to put the best minds available to work on vast problems of policy and strategy? Out of this have come the beginnings of an idea that perhaps provision should be made for some sort of elite corps of "thinkers"—scholars and experts who, free of administrative responsibility and attachment to particular services or departments, would have no other function than to cerebration about basic problems.

MOST such ideas, Jackson notes, are still in the germinal state at this point. A long period of study will be necessary after the hearings are concluded before concrete proposals begin to take shape. It will then be necessary to get the authority from Congress to put them into effect or, where legislation is not required, to persuade the new Administration to adopt them.

But the important thing, he feels, is to bring some new light and fresh ideas to the task of creating government policy to meet the challenge of the Nineteen Sixties.

"When you realize," he says, "that there has been no serious Congressional review of the policy-planning process for thirteen years, it is reasonable to think there may be some room for improvement."